

Cloudy Skies, Solid Rock Make Buried Treasure Hard To Find

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MERTZON, Texas — An astounding stroke of good fortune almost took place on our outfit here in the short grass country. If I didn't know that readers of this paper are preoccupied with drawing up strategy for late spring work, or frantically trying to effect a compromise with the Internal Revenue whereby the latter would accept a certain number of pints of blood as part payment on next year's income tax. I wouldn't dare reveal a word of my boss's luck.

Still, I must get it off my chest. In event you aren't too busy to read and remember this, I simply ask you, on behalf of my patron, to keep it in strictest confidence.

This is what happened:

Late one Monday evening, a gentleman dropped by my boss's new home at the ranch. He was a man about 60 or so and was mounted in a new pickup. And with hardly an ado he announced he was there to uncover a treasure on the ranch.

As I have mentioned in a previous lecture, we attract some of the world's strangest seekers of rare, exotic objects, so its practically impossible for us to be surprised. I suppose if a group drove up this very minute hunting a Kiwi bird, we'd ask them in without a second thought.

Our visitor this day said he knew there was a treasure on the ranch, that it was worth somewhere in the neighborhood of \$300,000 (which is a very good neighborhood), and it was buried only about three feet beneath the ground.

The boss was somewhat skeptical at first, but then the visitor added that the treasure was guarded by ghosts, which was the reason the treasure hadn't already been uncovered by the Mexican who buried it.

Now, as is well known by anybody who ever read a book on lost mines, or even a pamphlet on how to dive for pots of rubies in sunken galleons, it is just as impossible to have a hoard of lost valuables underground or at the bottom of the sea without a few attending ghosts as it is to run a government without carbon paper. A true treasure hunter won't lift a single rock, much less use a pick and shovel, until it has been ascertained that a few spooks inhabit the area.

Therefore, upon learning the treasure was haunted the boss quickly closed a deal in which 25 percent of take would go to him. The stranger left and was gone about 10 days. It seemed like a month because we were plenty heated up over the idea of finding a cache of buried money. It has been a long time since there has been any kind of "go" on this outfit except outgo.

Then came a long distance call and the date of the uncovering was set up. It was agreed that at 7 a.m. on a Saturday I was to meet the hunters and represent the boss in tallying and dividing the money or whatever it was we were about to unearth.

The day dawned cloudy. Anywhere except here in the short grass country you would have expected showers. Our party included my oldest son, the treasure hunter and his wife, and the hunter's partner. The latter, from all appearances, could have taken care of any kind of spook or goblin that might appear.

There was no waste of time. The leader got out a couple of long, thin strips of something resembling old time corset stays. (I believe some water witches use similar material). These pliable strips, he informed us, were whale teeth that had required four years to obtain from Alaska.

Whale teeth will beat anything else you have ever seen when it comes to finding the general location of a treasure. All he had to do was grasp each end (they were tied together), squinch up his eyes and mumble some words. The whale teeth instantly pointed where we needed to go — which was to the edge of a series of bluffs.

Here more equipment was unloaded. It was a machine or instrument called a "radiothesia," so modern and mysterious the word doesn't appear in Webster's latest. There was also a small black pendulum, ordered from England, that is so finicky it works only for its owner.

After taking a few more bearings with the whale teeth, the head hunter took up the radiothesia. With about the most squinched-up set of eyes you will ever run across, he began to mutter, almost in a whisper, "Find the treasure, find the gold." While he was doing this he was swinging the radiothesia, which (in case you're not familiar with this new instrument) is a glass cylinder attached to a piece of one-inch copper pipe by a piece of electric wire.

By this time I had the head treasure hunter to myself; my son, who has perused virtually all of Dobie's treasure stories and didn't like our location, had traipsed off in search of arrowheads. The leader's

wife was sitting in the warm pickup. The leader's hefty associate, scorning scientific methods, was exploring the bluffs the old-fashioned way.

So I took this opportunity to assure him that if we had really found the treasure's location and even though 25 percent of 300 grand was a lot of money, I had helped dig enough postholes on this outfit to know that this particular place wasn't at all suited to the type of prospector who thinks opening a rip-top beer can is hard work.

He replied that there was indeed a batch of silver and gold right beneath our feet, but on cloudy days like this the depth was hard to determine. Soon the whole group had reassembled. We stood there looking at the spot. Our appearance left no doubt that any of us could have used a good strike of gold or silver, but nobody seemed eager to tackle the digging.

The leader got out his English-made pendulum, which is not only effective in finding treasure but also in locating snake dens and even deer. We found a snake den or two and then still not knowing how deep was the treasure, but knowing solid rock was near the surface, we decided to come back some sunny day when the instruments would work better.

There has been an over-abundance of sunshine this spring, but the treasure seekers haven't returned. As far as I know, the booty still reposes there in its non-interest-bearing, non-taxable state.

The ghosts roam the hills undisturbed and my son has gone back to reading Dobie. My boss hadn't had time to worry about the fortune, being engrossed with his brood mares and their foals.

As for me, I'm sick at the thought of missing a chance to count all that money, and even sicker of my cow-chousing companeros' witty observations regarding treasure hunts. They'll see, someday when I start carrying a pistol loaded with silver bullets to keep the ghosts off me and my old horse Blucher.